

morning of 24th May, we had started up for the pass in clear weather but by 3 p.m., the time we approached the crest of the pass, clouds had gathered and it began to snow. As we were plodding along the level top of the pass I heard a swish of wings and low over me a flock of more than a score of Swifts *Apus apus* swept out of the vapours from the Kulu side and rushed on barely a few feet above the snow on into Lahoul.

Again, in May of 1972,—unfortunately I do not have the exact date but it was in the third week—we had experienced foul weather for several days. I was walking up the Solang Nulla when a group of trainees from the Manali Mountaineering Institute met me on their way down. I was asked to identify a

duck they had rescued on the scree near their base camp at app. 3350 metres at Bias Kund. It turned out to be a duck of the Common Teal *Anas crecca*. She had apparently been forced down by the storm as she, perhaps, with others of a flock was attempting to cross the Rohtang range. Though her flight feathers were badly worn, she looked in good shape. On my return to Manali I made enquiries about her fate but failed to gain any information. It is likely her migration ended in a duck curry.

The Kulu Valley has a north-south trend and at its head is the magnificent Rohtang range. The Rohtang Pass 3960 metres is the lowest part of the spectacular divide.

C/o. WWF-INDIA,
BOMBAY-400023,
February 17, 1977.

LAVKUMAR KHACHER

7. A BUZZARD NEST IN LADAKH

Besides the not wholly unexpected small numbers of the Tibetan Crane that we saw in Ladakh, what struck the members of the World Wildlife Fund sponsored BNHS expedition to Ladakh in June-July 1976, was the comparative scarcity of birds of prey. An occasional European Kestrel and two sightings of Lammergeier were all there was to report till we reached the banks of the Indus at Dungti. Here, on the grassy banks we saw our first long-legged buzzard (*Buteo rufinus rufinus*). We met it again and again in the Hanlé Valley, in Hanlé village and in Puga which prompted Dr. Sálím Ali to quip that the bird was probably waiting for the writer's carcass!

In Puga (height 4880 m) we sighted not a loner but a pair of long-legged buzzard and

it was not long before their nest was located, quite close to our camp on the ledge of a cliff. The nest was at a height of about 50 metres from the ground. The ledge on which it was built was quite inaccessible, there being big rocky overhangs just below and above it. The nest faced south while on the opposite side the ledge narrowed into a crevice in the rock that afforded a cool retreat to the birds from the heat of the sun. The nest was made up of Caragana twigs, grass tufts, cotton and wool rags, plastic-coated cable and pieces of manila rope, a liberal supply of man-made items being available in the Geological Survey camp down below.

As there was no place to put up a blind near the nest, we watched it from a convenient look-out ledge in the open, at a distance of

about 25 metres but approximately at the same level from the ground. As we could not hide ourselves the parent birds did not dare enter the nest, but on three occasions flew very near it in response to fervent calls from the juvenile occupying the nest. However, from the ground below one could see both the parents entering the nest by turn. One of them, probably the female (larger size), was a frequent visitor and had its favourite perch on a projecting rock about 30 metres above. The other bird was twice seen perched on the same ridge but almost a kilometre away from the nest.

A juvenile bird, probably two months old, occupied the nest. It appeared to be fully feathered and about 40 cm in height. Its head was creamy-buff, beak black, sharply hooked and with a lemon-yellow patch at the base. Feathers on the back were dark-brown and on the throat and breast dusty white with vertical brown streaks. Its tail was brown with white horizontal bars. The Tarsi were feathered, feet orange-yellow and talons black.

The parent bird that frequently came into the nest, was dark brown or chocolate in colour, lighter on head and breast and with a buff patch on the nape. Its beak was light yellow with a black tip.

On the morning of 19th July 1976, the nest was watched for about four hours. At first the juvenile was facing away from the observer and looked at him over its back. Then it turned and faced south. For a long time it looked around quietly from its high vantage

point. It stretched its wings, spread out its tail-feathers, jerked its body and shuffled its feathers from time to time. Once it almost mounted over the edge of the nest to peer down the precipice. Then turning a full circle, its tail dangling beyond the edge of the nest, it defecated neatly over the edge and out in the air. From time to time it disappeared into the crevice to seek shelter from the sun.

For most of the time the parent bird was seen perched on its favourite rock above the nest. Once it rose on its wings, squealed and was airborne for almost forty-five minutes, calling from time to time. Its call sounded like a broad mew. Once it was gone for almost fifty minutes. During its absence the juvenile began calling. First it gave three short whistles and repeated the performance six times. It was probably thirsty for it stood panting with beak agape. When it saw the parent it called loudly and was twice rewarded with the former's close approach. The parent however, did not drop any food. Interestingly enough, house martins who had their nests on the same cliff about 10 metres below, constantly flitted about, sometimes coming very close to the edge of the nest. They showed little fear of the buzzards.

As noon approached the juvenile began calling more frequently. It was probably both thirsty and hungry. Soon thereafter observation was terminated as it appeared that the human presence was preventing the parent from entering the nest, thus prolonging the hardships of the youngster.

184 SHANIWAR PETH,
POONA 411 030,
June 8, 1977.

PRAKASH GOLE